

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**WETLAND ENHANCEMENT**

(Ac.)

**CODE 659**

**DEFINITION**

The rehabilitation or re-establishment of a degraded wetland, and/or the modification of an existing wetland.

**PURPOSE**

To provide specific wetland conditions to favor specific wetland functions and targeted species by:

- hydrologic enhancement (depth duration and season of inundation, and/or duration and season of soil saturation).
- vegetative enhancement (including the removal of undesired species, and/or seeding or planting of desired species).

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies on any degraded or non-degraded existing wetland where the objective is specifically to enhance selected wetland functions.

This practice does not apply to the following where the intention is to:

- treat point and non-point sources of water pollution (Constructed Wetland 656);
- rehabilitate a degraded wetland where the soils, hydrology, vegetative community, and biological habitat are returned to original conditions (Wetland Restoration 657);
- create a wetland on a site that historically was not a wetland (Wetland Creation 658).

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

The purpose, goals and objectives of the enhancement shall be clearly outlined, including the soils, hydrology and vegetation criteria that are to be met and are appropriate for the site and the project purposes.

The impact of this practice on existing non-degraded wetland functions and/or values will be evaluated.

The soils, hydrology and vegetative characteristics existing on the site and the contributing watershed shall be documented before enhancement of the site begins.

Where known nutrient and pesticide contamination exists, species selected will be tolerant of these conditions.

Sites containing hazardous material shall be cleaned prior to the establishment of this practice. Appropriate actions to clean sites suspected of containing hazardous wastes shall be based on soil tests.

Equipment travel, grazing, haying, habitat management/maintenance practices, and other disturbance activities shall be restricted during critical periods such as nesting and brood rearing seasons. In Mississippi, this critical period is from April 1 to October 1. Exceptions can be allowed to maintain the health of the plant or ecological community being managed for the benefit of wildlife (e.g., mechanical or other means to control noxious vegetation during establishment or restoration of desirable vegetation or use of prescribed fire to mimic natural seasonal occurrence of fire). Exceptions must be approved by an

NRCS biologist.

Invasive species, federal/state listed noxious plant species, and nuisance species (e.g., those whose presence or overpopulation jeopardize the practice) shall be controlled on the site. The establishment and/or use of non-native plant species shall be discouraged.

Any use of fertilizers, mechanical treatments, prescribed burning, pesticides and other chemicals shall assure that the intended purpose of the wetland enhancement shall not be compromised.

#### **Criteria for Hydrologic Enhancement**

The hydrology of the site (defined as the rate and timing of inflow and outflow, source, duration, frequency, and depth of flooding, ponding or saturation) shall meet the project objectives. An adequate source of water must be available to meet hydrology designs.

Timing and level setting of water control structures is required for the establishment of desired hydrologic conditions for management of vegetation and for optimum wildlife and fish use.

Existing drainage systems will be utilized, removed or modified as needed to achieve the intended purpose.

#### **Criteria for Vegetative Enhancement**

Establish native hydrophytic vegetation typical for the wetland type(s) being established. Each state will develop specific guidelines that consider soil, seed sources and species.

Where natural colonization of selected species will dominate within 5 years, natural regeneration can be left to occur.

Adequate substrate material and site preparation necessary for proper establishment of the selected plant species shall be included in the design.

If the targeted hydrophytic vegetation is predominantly herbaceous, several species adapted to the site shall be established. Herbaceous vegetation may be established by a variety of methods including: mechanical or aerial seeding, topsoiling, organic mats, etc., over the entire site, or a portion of the site and at densities and depths appropriate.

For forested wetland establishment, where six or more native species are adapted to the site, reforestation shall include at least six species.

Seeding rates shall be based upon percentage of pure live seed within 6 months of planting.

#### **CONSIDERATIONS**

Dike (356), Wetland Restoration (657) and Structure for Water Control (587) may be used to enhance the performance of this practice.

Biological control of undesirable plant species and pests (e.g., using predator or parasitic species) should be implemented where available and feasible.

Consider manipulation of water levels to control unwanted vegetation.

Haying or grazing shall be used as appropriate to manage vegetation. Minimize disturbance to ground nesting species, especially during the primary nesting season.

Consider existing wetland functions and/or values that may be adversely impacted.

Consider effect enhancement will have on disease vectors such as mosquitoes.

The inclusion of microtopography can achieve changes in depth and duration of flooding without changing extent of surface area.

Consider effect of volumes and rates of runoff, infiltration, evaporation and transpiration on the water budget.

Consider effects on downstream flows or aquifers that would affect other water uses or users.

Consider effects on fish and wildlife habitats that would be associated with the practice.

Consider linking wetlands by corridors wherever appropriate to enhance the wetland's use and colonization by the flora and fauna.

Establishing vegetative buffers on surrounding uplands can reduce sediment and soluble and sediment-attached contaminant delivery by runoff and/or wind.

Consider effects on temperature of water resources to prevent undesired effects on aquatic and wildlife communities.

Soil disturbance associated with the installation of this practice may increase the potential for invasion by unwanted species.

On sites where woody vegetation will dominate, consider adding 1 to 2 dead snags, tree trunks or logs per acre to provide structure and cover for wildlife and a carbon source for food chain support.

For discharge wetlands, consider underground upslope water and/or groundwater source availability.

When determining which species to plant, consider microtopography and the different hydrology levels.

Consider the effects that location, installation and management may have on subsurface cultural resources.

Consider the effect of water control structures on the ability of fish to move in and out of the wetland.

Consider the effects that water level draw downs will have on the mortality of aquatic species such as turtles.

Consider timing of water control to mimic the natural hydrological regime of the area, further enhancing the habitat for aquatic species.

Consider design modifications that will limit potential negative impacts of wetland plants and animals on the project.

## PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications shall be transmitted to clients using NRCS approved specifications sheets, job sheets, technical notes, or customized narrative statements included in the conservation plan. Written specifications, schedules and maps shall be prepared for each planning area and each habitat type.

Specifications shall:

- Identify the amounts and kinds habitat elements, locations and management actions necessary to achieve the client's management objectives.
- Describe the appropriate method, timing and intensity of management needed to produce the desired habitat conditions and sustain them over time, such as

- required depth of water during the different seasons;
- types and sizes of structures required;
- desired native plant species and the means of establishing and maintaining them.

NRCS shall ensure that plans and specifications for this practice are reviewed and approved by an NRCS biologist and other staff with appropriate training in design and implementation of wetland restoration. Approval by state wildlife agency or other biologist can occur when directed by NRCS State biologist.

## OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following actions shall be carried out to ensure that this practice functions as intended throughout its expected life:

- Evaluate habitat conditions on a regular basis in order to adapt the conservation plan and schedule of implementation.
- A plan for operation and maintenance at a minimum should include monitoring and management of structural and vegetative measures.

Establish an inspection schedule for embankments and structures for damage assessment.

The depth of accumulated sediment should be measured and the accumulations removed when the planned project objectives are jeopardized.

## REFERENCES

Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species, February 3, 1999. Federal Register: vol.64, no.25. Feb. 8, 1999.

Hall, C.D. and F.J. Cuthbert. 2000. Impact of a controlled wetland drawdown on Blanding's Turtles in Minnesota. *Chelonian Conservation Biology*. Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 643-649.

Kingsbury, Bruce and Joanne Gibson. 2002. *Habitat Management Guidelines for Reptiles and Amphibians of the Midwest*. Partners for Amphibian and Reptile Conservation. Ft. Wayne, IN. 57 pp.

Maschhoff, Justin T. and James H. Dooley. 2001. Functional requirements and design parameters for restocking coarse woody features in restored wetlands. ASAE Meeting Presentation. Paper No. 012059.

USDA, NRCS, 2003. ECS 190-15: Wetland Restoration, Enhancement, Management & Monitoring. 425 pp.

USDA, NRCS. Wetland Restoration, Enhancement, or Creation, Engineering Field Handbook Chapter 13, Part 650, pp. 3, 24, 77, 78.

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